

126.
A
S E R M O N

On OCCASION of the much lamented

D E A T H

OF THE

Revd. Mr. *John Abernethy.*

PREACH'D IN

Wood-street, Dec. 7th. 1740.

By *JOHN MEARS*, M. A. *X*

Published at the Desire of many of
the Hearers.

JOHN V. 35. *He was a burning, and a
shining Light.*

D U B L I N :

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SEERMON

DEATH





A

SERMON, &c.

MATTH. XXV. 21.

His Lord said unto him, well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee Ruler over many things: Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

AS the great and good God, the fountain and original of all perfection, hath in his infinite Wisdom produced a great variety of Beings, of very different kinds and orders; so he hath given them certain powers, perfections and capacities,

cities, in very different degrees and proportions, but all in order to promote the common good and happiness of the whole system of intelligent Beings, and of every particular Member of that great Community, so far as he is capable of it.

It is not unreasonable to suppose that this beautiful variety takes place in all the systems of rational Beings that God has formed : And that it is so in fact amongst mankind is obvious to every one's observation, for all men have not the same degrees of knowledge and understanding, of reason and judgment, of wisdom and prudence, or acquired learning, nor the same genius and natural capacity : All men are not equally robust and healthy, equally rich, or great, and honourable in the world : All have not the same advantages of education, and opportunities of improvement in Arts and Sciences, or in their several callings and occupations. All these things are gifts and talents which the Wise Maker and governor of the world, distributes unto men in different kinds, degrees, and proportions, as he knows to be best and fittest for answering the wise ends of his righteous government. *To some are given ten talents, to others five, to others two, and to others but one, to every man according to his several ability ; according to his rank in the*

the creation, and the station which God hath placed him in ; and they are all given in their different kinds and proportions *to profit withal* ; our business is to improve the several talents that are committed to our trust, of whatever kind they be, to the ends and purposes for which they are given, that is, to be useful and do good with them, to employ them in promoting and increasing the happiness of others, in mitigating their sorrows and afflictions, in lessening their miseries, or removing them, as far as lies in our power : This is the duty of every man in his place and station, and according to the gifts and talents he is intrusted with ; and for the improvement, or neglect, or abuse of them must we all give an account hereafter to the great Lord of the Universe, and enjoy the tokens of his favour, or feel the effects of his displeasure, according as our account shall be.

AND this seems to be the *Moral* of this *Parable*, of which our text is a part, which contains the commendation that the Lord gave to the faithful servant for his fidelity and industry in improving what had been committed to his trust, his approbation of his conduct, and the invitation he gave him to take possession of the reward of his faithful service. *His Lord said unto him, well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou*

hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. And the same thing is repeated in the 23d verse to the servant who had made a suitable improvement of a smaller number of talents that had been committed to his care and management, to let us see that though all men do not receive an equal proportion of gifts and talents, yet if they faithfully improve what their Lord thinks fit to intrust them with, they shall all receive a proportionable reward, and partake more or less of his joy.

You see then *my Brethren* what is the duty of every man, and the service required of him, and what is the reward that every faithful servant may confidently expect from his Lord and Master : Our business is, to receive with gratitude the several gifts and talents which God thinks fit to bestow upon us, to consider seriously what they are, and for what ends and purposes they are given, to be faithful in the management of them, and careful to improve them *by a patient continuance in well doing* : And if we do our part with fidelity and diligence, then may we have confidence towards God, that we shall obtain his favour and approbation, *as good and faithful*

faithful servants, and be invited to enter into the joy of our Lord.

Now to excite us all to a due degree of zeal, diligence and fidelity in the improvement of our several talents, give me leave at this time to lay before you a short description of that *joy and happiness* which is prepared for the *good and faithful servant* in the future state, so far as God has been pleased to acquaint us with it.

THE Apostle *Paul* tells us that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things that God hath prepared for them that love him*, 1 Cor. 2. 9. 2. *Our life is hid with Christ in God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be*, Col. 3. 3. 1 John 3. 2. Our present conceptions of the joy and happiness of the future state are very imperfect and obscure, for we can know no more of it than what he who is the author and fountain of it thinks fit to let into our minds either by the light of nature or revelation; so much as he has by either of these ways communicated to us, we may know, but farther we cannot go with any certainty; now he has not thought fit to open up to us the fulness of those joys that are in his presence, the reasons of which may probably be, either because in our present State our faculties would not be able to bear such a discovery;

covery ; or were that happiness describ'd to us in it's full perfection, and with all the circumstances that attend it, we could not after all form a compleat idea of it, unless we actually enjoy'd it ; which would not be consistent with a state of trial, such as our present one is ; or lastly were our faculties able to bear such a degree of knowledge, cou'd they take in and comprehend the height and perfection of the future happiness, it would only serve to render our continuance in this world the more uneasy, so that we shou'd not be able to abide in it with any tolerable satisfaction ; our minds in that case would be so taken up with the thoughts of the joys and pleasures of Heaven, that we shou'd be impatient to be gone, we should become quite negligent of the present Life, and perfectly careless and unconcern'd about the things of this world ; and yet these are matters that demand some degree of care and attention, and are not to be wholly overlook'd and despis'd. These may probably be some of the reasons why God has not given us a full view of the joys of the future state, at least they are sufficient to justify his wisdom in concealing such knowledge from us.

THERE is however enough revealed to encourage us to be faithful and diligent in the improvement of our several talents,
which

which is all that is needful for us to know at present : For we are fully assured there is such a state, and that the happiness we shall enjoy in it, if we be *good and faithful Servants*, is above all that we are able to conceive or express. It seems chiefly to consist in these three things. 1. In being perfectly free from all evil, whether natural or moral. 2. In being perfectly virtuous and holy, and possessed of every thing that tends to perfect our nature. And 3. In the joyful assurance that this blessed state shall never have an end.

I. THERE will be an entire freedom and deliverance from every thing that is evil, whether natural or moral, whether the evil of pain, or the evil of sin. We all know from experience what a variety of troubles and miseries we are liable to in this world, *we are born to trouble as the sparks flee upward*, Job. 5. 7. This is a part of our lot and portion here, part of the discipline which our heavenly Father in his Wisdom and Faithfulness chuseth to make use of for our improvement in virtue, in order to train us up and dispose us for a better state ; our condition and abode in this world is a pilgrimage, and we are here as strangers and sojourners, passing on and travelling towards our heavenly Country. *While we sojourn in the body* (saith the Apostle,

posse, 2 Cor. 5. 6. 7.) *we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight*, and elsewhere, *Heb. 13. 14.* he says, *For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.* This earth is our place and state of trial, and it is very suitable to such a situation, that we shou'd be subject to afflictions and troubles and disappointments : It is best for us that it should be so ; for were it otherwise, we should be apt to forget our heavenly country, and seldom or never think of removing hence, and ascending to a more perfect State of virtue and happiness. It is therefore a wise contrivance that there shou'd be a mixture of good and evil in the lot of every man, that as by the one he is disposed to *Rejoice*, so by the other he may learn the useful lesson of *consideration*, and from the mixture of both which God hath wisely measured out to every one of us, *having set the one as it were over against the other*, we may be taught to *receive evil from his hand as well as good*, and in whatever state we are therewith to be content ; to set our affections on things above, and not on things on the earth, and to seek our happiness, not in the uncertain perishing enjoyments of this life, but in the favour of God, which is better than life, and who will be to all his good
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and faithful servants, the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever.

IN this world then we are by the wise appointment of providence as in a vale of tears, often disturbed with cares and sorrows and perplexities, and many things that give us uneasiness; our life is a continual labour, and a great part of the business of it, is a *fore travel which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised with*. There are many troubles which we cannot avoid being harassed with less or more, while we sojourn in these earthly tabernacles; we must labour and toil in our several callings and employments, for the support of ourselves, and those who have a dependence upon us, and in order to be useful and serviceable to the society of which we are members; and indeed it is our duty to do so, and we are acting a virtuous part, and improving our talents, when we are so employ'd: But will it not be a great happiness to be advanced into such a state and condition as to be above all earthly cares either for ourselves or others, to be out of the reach of all bodily wants, and to be able to exercise our good affections in a more noble and godlike manner, than it is possible for us to exert them here? why this will be our condition when we shall *enter into the joy of our Lord*, for in that state an
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end will be put to all our earthly cares and toils, we shall have no occasion for food or raiment, or habitation, without which we cannot subsist in this world, and so shall be free from all manner of anxious cares and uneasy thoughts about *what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed* :

AGAIN : While we sojourn in the body, we are liable to many pains and diseases, to melancholy accidents, and various disappointments, that are apt to breed vexation and disquiet, and at length we must yield to the last enemy death, to which we have a natural aversion : But in heaven there is no death, neither sorrow nor pain : That last enemy will then be overcome and destroy'd, corruption will be changed into incorruption, and mortality will be swallow'd up of life.

BUT farther, while we dwell in these tabernacles of flesh, and sojourn on this earth, we are continually exposed to a variety of snares and temptations, arising partly from our sensual appetites and passions, and partly from the terrors and allurements of the world ; by which means we are always in danger of being seduced, and are often betray'd into the practice of vice, and led aside from the paths of wisdom and virtue, into the ways of sin and folly.

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OUR sensual appetites and passions are implanted in us by the Author of our nature for very wise and good ends; and a competent portion of the good things of this life is necessary for our support and comfort while we are here; all these things are suitable and agreeable to our present state; but yet they are frequently great snares to us, and sometimes through our own fault and folly prove temptations too strong for us, and often lead us captive to the law of sin; and hereby it comes to pass, that those very passions which were implanted in us partly as spurs to virtue, and partly for our own preservation and greater security against surrounding dangers, prove an impediment to us in the practice of virtue, and many times draw after them as great inconveniencies as those they were intended to prevent: And those very riches, or honours, or pleasures, that very food and raiment, which kind providence liberally dispenses to us in larger or smaller proportions, as encouragements to well doing, and talents wherewith we may be very useful, and do a great deal of good, do yet, through our own imprudence and want of consideration, prove snares to entangle us in vice, and a great hindrance to us in our Christian course. And this no doubt is to a good and well disposed man the greatest burden and uneasiness of his life.

BUT

BUT now in heaven we shall be entirely free from all these evils and inconveniences which in the present state do so much retard our progress in virtue ; for in that blessed place all sin and vice and temptation shall be far removed from us, and we shall groan no more under the *bondage of corruption*, nor shall *a law in our members* rebel any more *against the law in our minds* ; the *body of death* shall then be wholly *subdued*, and we shall be out of all fears of our spiritual enemies, those *carnal and worldly lusts* that now *war against the soul* : Our *Christian warfare* is then at an end, we shall have *finish'd our course*, and having *come off more than conquerors through him that loved us*, shall obtain *a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away* ; and no adversary shall from thenceforth have any access to us. And oh ! What a happiness and pleasure must it be to a virtuous mind, to be delivered from such incumbrances as greatly obstruct the free exercise of good affections, and are the principal difficulty in the practice of virtue, for which we are naturally formed.

IN a word, when we shall have obtained the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions, we shall never feel or fear evil any more, for then shall be completely fulfilled the saying that is written, *death is swallowed up in victory, O death, where is thy*

thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IN heaven then there shall be no more sin nor temptation to it, no more sorrow nor pain, no more misfortunes, disappointments, or calamitous events, and no more diseases, nor death; for in that triumphant state we shall obtain a compleat deliverance from all those evils, and securely enjoy that rest that is prepared for the people of God, where we shall never more be liable to any kind of trouble. *The inhabitant shall not say I am sick, for death shall then be utterly abolished, and that immortal and incorruptible life which has been brought to light by the gospel shall take place. So that we shall not die any more, but shall be as the Angels. The righteous is taken away from the evils of this world, and gone in peace; they rest as in beds, each one who hath walked in his uprightness. Thus blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb who is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains*

fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

II. THE happiness of the future state doth also consist in the possession and enjoyment of every thing that is truly good, that tends to the perfection of our nature, and the improvement and gratification of its faculties. The happiness of such beings as we are must consist in the free exercise of our powers and faculties, our reason and understanding, our wills and affections, together with that inward pleasure, self approbation, and joyful hope which result from thence ; that is in other words, in the knowledge of such things as are excellent and worthy to be known, in the free choice of what is truly good, in the perfect and regular exercise of our good affections and virtuous dispositions, in the approbation of our own minds, and a conscious sense of our own integrity, and in the enjoyment of the favour and approbation of our Maker, the righteous Governor and Judge of the world : The man who is in such a state as we have now described is truly happy, and enjoys all the pleasure that is suitable to his nature.

Now such will be the condition of all the good and faithful servants of God in the future state ; for we shall then be made to know and understand all the great and excellent truths that are worthy of our search,
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which have a tendency to perfect our natures, to open and enlarge our faculties, and give a pleasure to the mind : And our knowledge shall then be clear, direct and full, and free from the imperfections, and mixtures of error and mistake, to which men of the greatest genius and best understanding are liable in the present state ; for here *we know but in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away : Here we see but as in a mirrour or looking glass, darkly or in a riddle, but then face to face, now we know only in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known, 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10, 12.* And certainly it cannot but afford an high and exquisite pleasure to every intelligent mind to be admitted to the clear and distinct knowledge of the most excellent objects, which is the delight of Angels, and one of the Glories of the supreme Being himself.

AGAIN, as our understandings shall be raised to great and unconceivable degrees of knowledge, so our wills and affections shall exert themselves in the free and delightful choice of the chiefest good, and in the love, esteem and veneration of the greatest and best of all Beings, and this will naturally lead us to the exercise of love towards all the heavenly inhabitants, which will give us

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high delight and satisfaction in beholding their happiness, and in the enjoyment of their Society.

THE Image of the Deity in which we are originally form'd shall then be freed from the blemishes and imperfections with which it appears in our present state, for we shall be advanced to as high degrees of holiness and virtue, and as near a resemblance to the moral perfections of God, as the condition of our nature, and our rank in the creation will admit ; *We shall behold his Face in Righteousness, we shall be satisfy'd when we awake with his likeness ; and when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is,* Psalm xvii. 15. 1 John iii. 2.

AND what will still add to the pleasure that must result from this exaltation of our nature is, that we shall be continually growing in these perfections of knowledge and virtue ; our minds always opening to take in larger and more comprehensive views of things, and our affections exerting themselves with greater strength and vigour towards their proper objects. Now from hence must necessarily arise an unconceivable joy and satisfaction, and unspeakable peace and tranquillity in the mind ; for knowledge and holiness, and the exercise of good affections are a never failing spring of true delight and a lasting fund of solid comfort : And accordingly

ingly the Scripture represents the state of heaven as made up of the greatest joy, the most noble and manly pleasures, the truest satisfactions, and most divine enjoyments. *In thy presence is fullness of joy, saith the Psalmist, (Psalm xvi. 11.) at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.* And in the following Psalm xvii. 15. *I shall behold thy Face in Righteousness, I shall be satisfy'd when I awake, with thy likeness.* And again, Psalm xxxvi. 8, 9. *They shall be abundantly satisfy'd with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasure; for with thee is the fountain of life, in thy light shall we see light.* And in Isaiah xxxv. 10. *The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* And our Saviour pronounces a state of comfort to the mourners, *Matth. v. 4. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

AND all this pleasure shall be greatly increased by the agreeable Society we shall be in, for we shall be admitted to the presence of the blessed God, the fountain of happiness and perfection, and enjoy the marks of his favour, which is better than life, and the light of his Countenance, which will put a gladness into our hearts, infinitely exceeding

the joy men feel in the pleasures or affluence of this world : We shall live in the presence of Christ, beholding his Glory, and sharing with him in his Joy : We shall have the company of the blessed Angels, and glorified Saints like ourselves, with whom we shall live in perfect love and friendship ; for in this happy Society there shall be no jars or contentions, no wars or confusions, no hatred or malice, envy or ill-will, nothing to cool our love, or abate our affection ; but the most perfect union, peace and harmony shall reign among us, and mutual love give law to all our thoughts.

BUT 3dly, The joy and happiness of God's faithful servants in the future State, is yet farther heightened from this important consideration ; that it shall never have an end, but continue for ever. For so we are very expressly taught in holy Scripture, as *Matth. 25. 46. the righteous shall go into life eternal. John 3. 16. 18. 36. He that believeth on the Son, namely, so as to be led thereby to a sincere obedience to his laws, shall not perish, but have everlasting life ; and again, to them who by a patient continuance in well-doing look for glory, honour and immortality, God will give eternal life, Rom. 2. 7.*

BUT that the happiness of the future State is of an eternal continuance, may very reasonably be believed from the consideration

tion of the Divine perfections, particularly his unchangable wisdom, goodness and power. For what was it that moved God to produce any Beings at all, was it not to communicate happiness? Why then is it not reasonable to conclude that the same goodness which moved him to exert his infinite wisdom and power in contriving and making, preserving and governing the beautiful frame of the world, with the miriads of Beings wherewith it is replenished, of various kinds and orders, and very different degrees of perfection, but all capable of proportionable degrees of happiness: And particularly to give being to us the inhabitants of this earth, to conduct us by a constant watchful providence through all the stages of life, and bring us at length into a state of perfection, into the possession and enjoyment of as great happiness as our nature is capable of. I say, is it not reasonable to conclude that the same wisdom and goodness will move him to continue us in that happy State for ever? To suppose otherwise wou'd seem to be a reflection on his unchangable perfections, and to represent him as weak and variable, fickle and capricious, which wou'd be a most unworthy conception, and a blasphemous representation of the most perfect Being.

AND the same thing is farther evident from what has been already said in describ-

ing the nature of that happiness, which wou'd not really be so great as the sacred writers have every where represented it, were it not to last for ever: To set this argument in a clear light, let us suppose a person placed in a State of the highest happiness his nature is capable of, and enjoying the most exquisite pleasures he could desire; but yet this State is sometime or other to have an end, and he knows that after some certain period he must be deprived of it; I ask wou'd not this throw a damp on all his pleasures, and quite spoil the satisfaction he might otherwise have in finding himself in such an happy situation? Certainly it must, as oft as he shou'd reflect on its temporary duration, a reflection which in that case he cou'd not easily avoid frequently to entertain. Let us suppose again an offer made of two different States of happiness, and we are left to chuse which we please, One is, a low inferiour degree of happiness but of an endless duration, the other is, the highest degree of happiness we are capable of being advanced to, only it is to be enjoy'd for a limited time: Now I ask which of these two States is the more eligible in the judgment of any wise considering person? We may I think reasonably presume that any one of the least prudence and reflection wou'd chuse the former; for it is infinitely preferable,

preferable, and there is no room for comparison. The happiness of Heaven then wou'd not be so great, so desirable, and so earnestly and zealously to be sought after, as the Scriptures every where represent it to be, were it not strictly eternal, and never to have an end.

BUT blessed be God the case is not so, we know and are assured from him *who cannot lye, and whose promises are all Yea and Amen*, that the heavenly State is an eternal spring of pure and unspeakable delight, which shall never fail, a *Tree of life* whose leaves shall never wither, but be still fresh and flourishing, so that we shall *never hunger or thirst or dye any more*. It is an *eternal weight of glory, a kingdom that cannot be moved, an inheritance that is incorruptible, and fadeth not away*.

I HAVE but two things further to observe concerning this subject, one is, That though all good and faithful servants shall enter into the joy of their Lord, yet they are not all to be equal in glory and perfection, which will be different according to the different talents and capacities that were given them, and the improvement they made of them; and in proportion to their various and different attainments in holiness and virtue, or their sufferings on the account of a good conscience, and patient enduring

the troubles of life. And this is a thing so reasonable in it self, so agreeable to the wisdom of God, and his usual method of dispensing his gifts and favours, and so plainly taught in several places of holy Scripture, that we need not insist largely upon it: A passage or two to this purpose shall suffice, and one may be the parable which we have in the 19th. chapter of the Gospel according to *Luke*, concerning a nobleman going to a far country, and delivering to his ten servants ten pounds to occupy or trade with till he shou'd return: When he called them to an account, we find that different rewards were distributed unto them in proportion to the different improvement they had made of their Lord's money, for he who had improved his pound to ten, has authority given him over ten cities, and he who had improved his pound only to five, has authority given him only over five cities. And in the 1st. Epistle to the *Corinthians* the 15th. chapter at the 40th. and 42d. verses, the Apostle tells us, That as there is one glory of the Sun, another of the Moon, and another of the Stars, (for one Star differeth from another Star in glory) so also is the resurrection of the dead. Alluding probably to that remarkable passage in the book of *Daniel* the 12th. chapter the 2d. and 3d. verses. *Many of them who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,*
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some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they who have been wise, (in the margin it is rendered Teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they who have turned many to righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever.

THE other thing I wou'd observe relating to this subject of our future happiness is this, that though the joy into which the good and faithful servant shall be admitted in the other world, may not be communicated to him in all its fullness and perfection, till after the resurrection, and the general judgment, yet even in the separate and intermediate State, during the interval between death and the resurrection, the Soul is in a State of great and unspeakable happiness, being delivered from all the evils both natural and moral with which the present imperfect State so much abounds, and entered upon an unchangable and everlasting State of perfection, in which there will be a constant progress to all eternity. It enjoys immediately after death the beginning of its reward, and waits with a patient and joyful expectation the redemption of the body; and does not (as some have vainly and foolishly imagin'd) fall into a State of sleep or insensibility. The doctrine of the sleep of the Soul during its separation from the body, seems to me an useless and uncomfortable hypothesis, and
without

without any plausible support either from reason or Scripture; nor is it easy to conceive what shou'd have led any one into such a whimsical and unphilosophical notion, as it seems to me, especially when it is contrary to several passages of holy Scripture, as particularly to what our Saviour says in the parable of the *Rich man* and *Lazarus* in the 16th. of *Luke* from the 22d. to the 25th. verse, where *Lazarus* is represented as carried by Angels into *Abraham's* bosom, and as being there in a State of consciousness, and enjoying happiness immediately upon his removal out of the body: And this reasoning is not founded upon a bare circumstance of the parable, but upon the principal design of it, arising out of the very *moral* of the story, which is plainly enough pointed out to us in the 25th. verse, where *Abraham* is introduced saying to the *rich man*, *Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* This hypothesis, is also most evidently contrary to what the Apostle *Paul* builds his reasoning upon in the 5th. chapter of his 2d. Epistle to the *Corinthians*, where he says in the 8th. verse, (and it seems to be the foundation of his whole exhortation, to patience and integrity under sufferings and persecutions,) *we are confident, I say, and willing*

willing rather to be absent from the Body, and to be present with the Lord. Which words do sufficiently imply, that the soul in its state of separation and absence from the body, is present with the Lord, and enjoying happiness in his presence, for in the 7th verse he represents the present life as a state of hope and faith and expectation, not of enjoyment, that being reserved for the future, which is a state of sight and fruition, *we walk* (saith he) *by Faith, and not by sight*; the present life you see is represented only as a pilgrimage, a sojourning as in a foreign country, and a walking by faith: But the state after death, is called *walking by sight and being present with the Lord.*

BUT how is it possible to reconcile this melancholy uncomfortable notion with the the strait which the same Apostle was in, as he tells us in his Epistle to the *Philip.* i. 23, 24. *I am in a strait* (says he) *betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better, nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.* Now if his soul was to fall into a state of sleep or insensibility immediately upon its exit out of the Body, and so continue till the Resurrection, how cou'd he be at a loss what to chuse? No good man, much less such an one as the Apostle *Paul*, cou'd be in any doubt how to determine in
such

such a case, for wou'd not any one that has the least spark of goodness prefer the present life with all the troubles and dangers that attend it, in order to promote the good of others, to increase their faith, and further their joy, to a state of sleep and insensibility, wherein having no thought or consciousness he can neither enjoy any degree of happiness himself, nor do, or even so much as wish or design the least good to others, but for the time he is supposed to continue in that state, he is just as if he were not at all. Much wiser and far more comfortable is the doctrine of an ancient *Jewish* writer, concerning the State of the Soul after death, *The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them, in the sight of the unwise; they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction; but they are in peace, for though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality, Wisd.*

3. 1, 2, 3, 4.

THUS now, my brethren, I have endeavoured to give you a plain and short account of the nature of that reward which is prepared for all good men in the world to come, so far as we can learn it from the perfections of God, from the nature of the human soul, and from the declarations of
Holy

Holy Scripture ; but the best account that can be given of it must be very imperfect, and come far short of what it really is ; for, as was observed at the beginning from the Apostle *Paul*, *Eye hath nor seen, nor Ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive the things which God hath prepared for those who love him.*

BUT from what little hath been said concerning it, we may see it. What a powerful motive we have to engage us to a faithful and diligent improvement of our several talents, of whatever kind they be, *well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord.* O ! how shou'd the consideration of such a kind invitation, such an affectionate welcome, such a joyful and comfortable approbation from the mouth of our Lord, encourage us to diligence and fidelity in his service ; and by *a patient continuance in well doing, to look for glory, honour, and immortality*, since we know and are assured that the end of such a course will be *eternal life*. Let this glorious and happy prospect then, be a support to us under all the troubles and difficulties, the trials and conflicts we may meet with, while we are here employed in our Masters Service : Let us *still retain our integrity, and never let it go, but always exercise our selves to have consciences void of offence both*
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towards God and Man. Let us never weary in well doing, for in due time we shall reap the reward if we faint not ; and let us be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labour in the Lord shall not be in vain.

BUT further, 2dly, Let us learn from what we have heard to fortify our minds against the fears of death ; for to all good men it is but a passage into a glorious immortality. It is an happy removal from a state of trial, wherein they are exposed to many evils and inconveniencies, to a state of everlasting rest and peace, and *a joy that is unspeakable, and full of Glory.* And why then shou'd a good man be afraid to die ? since *Christ* hath taken away the *sting of death*, since he hath broken it's power, and *abolish'd it*, and brought life and immortality to light through his Gospel. All such as are conscious of their own sincerity in the practice of Religion and Virtue, who have honestly endeavoured to improve the talents committed to their trust, and to *serve their generation faithfully by the Will of God*, have no reason to be afraid of death, but rather to meet it with joy, and be thankful that their warfare is so near an end ; they may look back with self-approbation on a well spent life, and comfort themselves with the prospect of an happy immortality in the noble

noble and triumphant Words of the Apostle *Paul*, in the view of his Martyrdom. *I have fought a good fight, I have finish'd my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing,* 2 Tim. 4. 7, 8.

AGAIN 3dly, That this great motive to the practice of virtue may have a proper influence upon our minds, we should often raise our thoughts above this world, and make the happiness of the future state, the frequent subject of our serious meditations. We shou'd keep Heaven and Eternity always in view, and have respect to the recompence of reward, and the joy that is set before us: This will quicken us in our Christian course, and make us zealous and diligent in the improvement of our talents, it will fortify us against the assaults and shocks of our spiritual enemies, and be a great support to us in the practice of virtue; nor need we be afraid that it will detract any thing from the worth of virtue, or lessen the value of it to have regard to a future state, for you may see from what has been said of the nature of the heavenly reward, that it consists chiefly in the perfection of holiness and virtue; and therefore to have
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respect to such a reward is so far from being a mark of a mercenary spirit, that it is rather an evidence of a noble, godlike and virtuous mind.

Once more, 4thly, Let us improve what we have been hearing concerning the future happiness of all *the good and faithful servants of Jesus Christ* as a motive of consolation upon the death of our Christian friends, of whom we have reason to hope and believe that they were *faithful* in their service, and are now entered into the joy of their Lord. This is the use the Apostle *Paul* teacheth us to make of this doctrine in his 1st. Epistle to the *Thessalonians*, Chap. 4th from the 13th Verse and downwards, where, in order to assuage their grief for the death of their Christian friends, he addresseth himself to them thus, *but I would not have you to be ignorant, Brethren, concerning them who are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others who have no hope, for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, them also who sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.* And after speaking of those who shall be found living on the earth at the last day, and of the order of the Resurrection, he adds, *and so shall we be ever with the Lord, wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

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'Tis true, grief being a natural passion, we cannot avoid feeling some degrees of sorrow and concern at parting with a dearly beloved friend or relation, whom we are never more to see in this world; nor is there any evil in being thus affected on such occasions, if we keep our passion within due bounds, for it is a natural consequence of friendship and affection, which are eminent virtues.

BUT now in order to mitigate our sorrow and restrain it within the bounds of decency, and the rules of religion, we shou'd consider and reflect where our friend is gone; his Body indeed is laid in the grave, *the house appointed for all living, neither shall his place know him any more*; but his better part, the immortal and incorruptible spirit that animated the body, is still alive, and associated with the Holy Angels, and *the Spirits of the just made perfect*, and is got above all the toils and troubles, the snares and temptations, the weakneses and imperfections, that attend the present state. We shou'd rather therefore rejoice because he is gone to *the Father of Spirits*, and is *present with the Lord*; his death may be to us a great and grievous loss, but to himself it is a great and unspeakable gain, and the consideration of this should silence our complaints, allay our grief, and teach us to

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bear our loss with patience, submission and resignation.

THE general instruction we should all learn from the many instances of mortality that daily occur to our observation, is, to reflect upon our own frail and mortal condition, to *consider our latter end*, and remembering that *in the midst of life we are in death*, to give diligence to make our calling and election sure, by increasing and abounding in all the *Christian virtues*, and *perfecting holiness in the fear of God*. I doubt not but *Balaam's* wish is the desire of every one who believes any thing of another world, *let me die the death of the Righteous, and let my last end be like his*; but a cold desire, a faint and ineffectual wish will not be sufficient to produce such an happy event; no; there is no other sure and certain way of attaining to that comfortable end, than that of an holy and righteous life, which is the only true preparation for an happy death; and since the *time is short*, and none of us know how soon we may be called to give an account of our stewardship, it concerns us all to improve the present seasons and opportunities of doing good, while we have them, to live above the world, and keep our affections disengaged from earthly things, *rejoicing as though we rejoiced not, weeping as though we wept not, buying as though*

though we possessed not, and using this world, as not abusing it, or being sunk, and immers'd in it, for the fashion of this world passeth away.

BUT beside this general instruction to be got from the numerous instances of mortality that are frequently to be met with, there is a useful lesson to be learned from the death of a valuable friend, and indeed it is the proper use we shou'd make of such an event, and the best testimony we can give of our regard to his memory ; it is this, to endeavour to imitate the virtues that adorn'd his life, which engaged our esteem and affection, and rendered him amiable in our eyes, and which give us reason to hope and believe that he is *entered into the joy of his Lord.*

IT is with this view, and for this end, I would attempt at present to bring to your remembrance some of those many virtues and excellencies, *which you have observed, and seen* in your late worthy *Pastor*, and my dear and much esteemed friend, whom I honoured as a *Father* and a *Guide*, the Reverend Mr. *John Abernethy*, now deceased. I am very sensible how unfit a person I am to make an Essay on the Memory of so great a Man, and therefore I shall not take upon me to draw a compleat character

of him ; that I leave to another hand, who, I hope, will oblige the world with a few Memoirs of his Life and character, to be prefixed to some Volumes of his Sermons fitted for the press, which will shew what great talents God had bestowed upon him, and what a faithful improvement and good use he had made of them ; his own works, when they see the light, as I hope they may in due time, will be the best encomium on him, and yield useful instruction as well as an agreeable entertainment to all who shall peruse them with attentive and unprejudic'd minds, and be highly acceptable to such as are true judges of good sense, and have any taste for pure religion, and genuine Christian Morality. For he was a *scribe well instructed unto the Kingdom of God*, and thoroughly furnished with all the qualifications and accomplishments that can be desired in a *Teacher of the Christian Religion* ; he possessed the most valuable talents in an eminent degree, and employed them in the service of his great *Master* with the utmost fidelity.

HE was well acquainted with all the branches of useful and valuable learning, and knew how to make them subservient to the interest of *Religion*, the grounds and evidences whereof he had duly examined, and from a rational conviction and full persuasion of

of mind, did heartily embrace and faithfully preach, and zealously practise that *Religion* which is built upon them, the usefulness and excellency of which he highly admir'd. He was indeed an honest, impartial inquirer after truth, and whenever he found it, he would cordially *receive it in the love of it*, for his mind was always open to conviction, and ready to submit to the force of superior evidence.

HIS sentiments of *Religion* were perfectly just and rational, as his practice of it was truly sincere, uniform and consistent, for he well understood the nature and design of Christianity, and had not the least tincture of superstition either in his opinions, his temper, or his practice; he never laid an undue stress on little things, such as rites and ceremonies, modes and circumstances, and matters of *doubtful disputation*, concerning which the *reason of men*, and the *sincerity of Christians* might permit them to differ, (as I have heard him sometimes express himself) and yet at the same time he always maintain'd a due regard to every thing that bore the stamp of Divine Authority, though it might be but of lesser moment in comparison with other things.

HE had thoroughly considered and well understood the great design of the *Christian Religion*,

Religion, the nature of the *Gospel Covenant*, and the terms of our acceptance with God, by which he had formed the temper of his own mind, and carefully ordered the tenor of his conversation; this end he always kept in view and steddily pursued in his publick ministrations, and made all his studies subservient to it; and his great abilities, and valuable talents were continually employed to promote holiness and virtue in the hearts and lives of men, which is the great design of the *Christian Revelation*, and without which nothing can avail to recommend us to the favour of God.

As to his intellectual endowments, God had blessed him with an uncommon *Genius*; he had a large comprehensive understanding, a clear penetrating judgment, with a surprising sublimity of thought. In any point of controversy he cou'd quickly discern the true state of it, and soon perceive what were the most pressing difficulties with which either side of it was attended: And cou'd wisely and judiciously separate what was plain and certain, or only probable, from what was obscure, uncertain, improbable, or perhaps beyond the reach of our faculties; for he was very sensible of the imperfection of human knowledge, and the limited capacities of the human mind, and therefore wou'd never attempt to go beyond
his

his depth, nor seek to be wise above what is written.

AND for this reason he prudently and modestly left *secret* and *unscrutable mysteries* to him to whom alone they belong : and applied himself chiefly to the study of those things, which are within the compass of the human understanding, and most useful for the wise and virtuous conduct of human life, such as, the great foundations of *natural* and *reveal'd religion*, the *perfections* and *attributes* of *God*, so far as we can attain to the knowledge of them either by his *works*, or by the *Revelations* contained in the *Holy Scriptures* ; the frame and constitution of the *human nature*, with the extent and obligation of moral duties ; the *nature* and *design* of the *Evangelical dispensation* as it is taught and delivered in the *sacred writings* : All which he had carefully studied, and thoroughly digested, and well understood.

HIS publick performances in the pulpit were no other than what we wou'd reasonably expect from a man so well qualify'd, and richly furnish'd with great natural abilities, and a large stock of acquired learning ; it wou'd be too low a character of his Sermons to say, that they were not hasty productions, superficial Essays, or little flo-

rid academical declamations : His great mind, and the high sense he had of the importance of *Religion*, set him above such mean things ; his discourses were the result of close study and application, of deep thought, and serious meditation, and were full of solid and useful instructions, with warm addresses, and earnest applications to the hearts and consciences of his hearers : His sentiments were great and noble, his reasoning was clear and strong, and usually carry'd light and conviction along with it ; his quotations from Scripture were always pertinent, for few men had study'd it more, or understood it better ; his style was correct, nervous and masculine ; and there was a *Spirit* of *piety* and *charity*, of *zeal* for *pure and undefil'd Religion*, and the salvation of men, visible in all his composures : He never entertain'd his hearers with barren and useless speculations, or *foolish* and idle *questions* that are good for nothing but to *gender strife* and contention, but he preached the pure and genuine doctrines of *Christianity* in *simplicity* and *love* ; and if at any time he happened to treat on a point of controversy in the pulpit, which sometimes cannot be well avoided, he was sure to do it with *candour* and *judgment*, and with a *Spirit* of *Meekness* and *Forbearance*,
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of *Moderation* and *Charity* towards those who were otherwise minded.

HIS other publick ministrations, such as *prayer*, and the celebration of those *positive institutions*, which we commonly call *Sacraments*, were of a piece with his *preaching*, and in these exercises he studied and *sought out acceptable words*, and made such a judicious choice of scripture expressions, intermixed with others that were grave and solemn, and unexceptionable, and suited to excite devout affections, that none cou'd be at a loss in joining with him.

HIS moral excellencies, the temper of his mind, and the virtues of his life were truly great and noble, and worthy of imitation, he was an *example* to all who had the happiness to know him, *in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*. And he carefully observed in his own practice what he recommended to others, *in all things he shewed himself a pattern of good Works*, as *in doctrine he shewed uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, and sound speech that cannot be condemn'd*. You among whom he laboured know, and all that were acquainted with him can bear witness, *how holily, and justly and unblameably he behaved himself among you, and towards all men*.

HIS

HIS great soul was full of love to God, and to the whole rational creation ; he had a large share of the kind and generous affections that are implanted in the human nature, which he had carefully cultivated, and well improved, and in the exercise whereof he took great pleasure ; for he was always disposed to do good as he had opportunity, and according to his ability ; it was his delight to do the will of God, to answer the design of his creation, and improve the talents that were committed to his trust.

IT wou'd be endless to enumerate all the particular virtues that shone in his conversation ; but there were some parts of his temper and deportment so lovely, venerable and engaging, that they cannot be pass'd over in silence, though, I need only mention them, for they who knew him cou'd not but observe and admire them.

HE was a man of true sincere friendship without any boasting professions, and shared in the joys and sorrows of his friend, as if they had been his own : He had an uncommon degree of prudence without any mixture of cunning ; the wisdom of the Serpent and the innocence of the Dove were happily united in his mind ; and as for dissimulation, he was the farthest from it of any man, and an utter stranger to guile and deceit ;

ceit ; he knew not what it was to pretend one thing and mean another, but the utmost plainness and sincerity, uprightness and integrity run through his whole conversation, with all the frankness and openness that was consistent with discretion. He was blest with a natural cheerfulness of temper that render'd him a most agreeable companion, having nothing of the extremes of melancholy discontent and peevishness on the one hand, or excessive mirth and levity on the other ; for he was grave without being lowre or morose, free and facetious without being improperly familiar, or ludicrous, his pleasantry was always governed by the rules of decency and good manners, and he was affable and condescending without stooping to any thing that was mean, or unworthy of his character. And these qualities together with his excellent good sense made his company both improving, and entertaining. He had *the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price*, and lovely in the esteem of men, and a most surprizing command of his temper, with great presence of mind, under pretty high provocations, of which I have been a witness on some occasions not needful to be mentioned at present, and to tell truth upon the best recollection I can make, I do not remember that ever I saw him

him ruffled, discomposed or transported with any thing. He seemed to have had the passion of resentment under such exact government that it never disturbed his understanding, but he was always possessed of himself, and a calmness and evenness of temper was become perfectly habitual to him. And this was accompany'd (as it usually is) with a forgiving spirit, and a disposition to live peaceably with all men, but more especially with his Christian Brethren, all such I mean who make a credible profession of Christianity, with respect to whom, however they might differ from him in matters of *doubtful disputation*, he was always ready to exercise *charity, forbearance and moderation*, to acknowledge them as *Christian Brethren*, and *receive them* as such, *endeavouring thus to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*

AND yet, notwithstanding his meek and peaceable temper, his moderation, charity and forbearance, and readiness to yield to any thing that was reasonable for the sake of peace, he wou'd never upon that or any other consideration submit to any thing that he judged to be wrong, or unreasonable, or to have a tendency to betray the cause of *truth, virtue or liberty*; in these things he was steddy and inflexible, firm and immovable as a rock, it was a ruling principle with him *to retain his integrity, to keep a good conscience,*

conscience, and faithfully to discharge his duty, in all cases and circumstances, and leave the issues and events of things to him *who knows the times and the seasons which he keeps in his own power*, and ordereth and disposeth as he knoweth to be best and fittest to answer the purposes of his wise and righteous government: This was the foundation of his steady adherence to what appeared to him a good cause, and hence was it that in maintaining and defending it he was resolute and courageous; *he was bold as a lion, and was not afraid of the faces of men*: At the same time he was perhaps one of the most candid and favourable men you wou'd meet with in passing a judgment of others who might differ from him, and chuse to act another part. He was not of a jealous suspicious temper, nor apt to censure or pass a judgment on others, or take a thing by a wrong handle, but was always dispos'd *to think and hope the best* and make all reasonable allowances for human frailties and infirmities.

He seemed to have had an habitual sense of God upon his mind, and a strong settled persuasion of the wisdom and goodness of his government in all events, so that nothing cou'd shock him, or shake his confidence in God; he was prepared for whatever might happen, and *was not afraid of evil tidings, for his heart was fixed, trusting in God*:

And

And this dependence on providence was accompanied with an entire submission and hearty resignation to the Divine Will, when he thought fit at any time to lay his afflicting hand upon him, and under some fore and sharp trials of affliction that he met with, *he possess'd his soul in such patience*, and bore them with such a calmness and tranquility of mind, and such a devout resignation to providence, as struck those who observ'd him with Admiration.

THE time wou'd fail me to speak of his strict temperance and sobriety, his exact purity of manners and abstractedness from the world, the justice and equity, fidelity and veracity that were observable in his whole conversation, his love to his country, and regard to the welfare of the publick, and the cause of liberty, his faithful observance of relative duties, with his prudent discreet and religious œconomy.

THERE is but one thing more I wou'd take notice of before I have done, namely that with all those rare accomplishments, intellectual and moral, with which he was endowed, really above most men of the age, he was singularly modest and self deny'd, and had nothing in his temper or behaviour that was arrogant or assuming, or favoured of pride and self conceit; but was *clothed with humility*, and very condescending.

SUCH

SUCH was the temper, conduct, and behaviour, and such were the talents and qualifications of that great and good man who has been lately taken from us ; to his own *gain* and advantage, I make no doubt, but to our great grief, and unspeakable loss. Those who did not know him may possibly think I have given him too high a character, but those who had the happiness of an intimate acquaintance with him, will readily allow that I have been so far from exceeding in any thing I have said of him, that I have rather fallen far short, and might have said a great deal more.

You *my brethren* who were his beloved charge have lost a most *faithful* and *affectionate Pastor*, one who had a sincere regard for your welfare, and an hearty concern for your best and truest interest, your progress in virtue and holiness, and your interest in the favour of God ; he shunned not to declare to you the whole counsel of God, and preach'd the whole *Religion of Christ*, *keeping back nothing that was profitable to you* ; and of use to promote your edification in faith and holiness. You lay near his heart in his last hours, and the day before he died, he expressed in the hearing of some who were about him his great concern for the congregation of *Wood-street*, and that they might be happily provided in a proper person to succeed him. I heartily sympathize with
you

you in your present circumstances, and pray God make up your loss.

YOUR surviving *Pastor* has lost an agreeable and comfortable *fellow labourer*, who truly sympathiz'd with him in all his afflictions; they join'd their counsels and endeavours to promote your good and further your joy, and lived together in perfect peace and harmony. All we who were his *brethren* in the *ministry* have lost an *affectionate brother*, a *faithful friend*, and a *wise and prudent adviser*.

IN a word, the death of Mr. *Abernethy* is a great loss to the *dissenting interest*, yea to the whole *protestant interest* in this *kingdom*; for he was a man of a large heart and a *catholick spirit*, and well understood the principles of the *reformation*, and the true liberties of men, and Christians, and was in every respect an ornament to his profession: *He was a burning and a shining light*, and had God so pleased, we cou'd most *willingly* have *rejoiced* a while longer in his light, but he has thought fit to withdraw him from us to shine in a higher Orb, and it becomes us to submit: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. Remember those who have been your guides, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

[F I N I S .



